

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-11 (Cancelled)

12. (Currently Amended) An expression cassette comprising:

a) a bacterial promoter, ~~hereinafter called~~ p_{Zn} , comprising a binding site for the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein, which site comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTT

(SEQ ID NO:1),

in which TTGACA represents is the -35 box of said promoter, and N represents A, C, G or T;

b) a sequence encoding a polypeptide ~~exhibiting~~ with at least 80% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein, placed under the transcriptional control of said promoter; and wherein the polypeptide is obtained from Lactococcus; and

c) at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence of interest under the transcriptional control of said promoter, and wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein.

13. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of claim 12, wherein

the p_{zn} promoter comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTNNNNNNNNNTATAT

(SEQ ID NO: 2),

in which ~~TATAAT~~ represents the ~~10~~ box of said promoter.

14. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of claim 13, wherein the p_{zn} promoter comprises a sequence selected from the group consisting of:

[[~~-~~ the sequence:]]

AAAAATAACGTTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTCTTTGCTATATAATTAACCATA

(SEQ ID NO:4); and

[[~~-~~ the sequence:]]

AAAAATAACGTTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTCTTTGCTATATAATTAACCAGTA

(SEQ ID NO:5).

15. (Currently Amended) An expression cassette comprising:

- a) a bacterial promoter p_{zn} as defined in claim 12; and
- b) at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of said promoter, and wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein.

16. (Currently Amended) ~~An~~ The expression cassette of claim 12 further comprising ~~resulting from the insertion of~~ a nucleotide sequence encoding an extracellular targeting peptide, ~~and of~~ operably linked to at least one restriction site

allowing for cloning of a nucleotide sequence as a translational fusion with said targeting peptide, wherein the targeting peptide and the at least one restriction site are under the transcriptional control of the p_{zn} promoter, into an expression cassette as claimed in claim 12.

17. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of Claim 16, wherein said extracellular targeting peptide is ~~a signal peptide of sequence:~~

MKKINLALLTLATLMGVSSTVVFA (SEQ ID NO:6).

18. (Currently Amended) ~~An~~ The expression cassette of claim 12 further comprising ~~resulting from the insertion of a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of the p_{zn} promoter, into an expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12, with the exclusion of the expression cassettes comprising~~ wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any all or part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein, fused to a reporter gene.

19. (Currently Amended) A recombinant vector comprising ~~an~~ the expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12.

20. (Currently Amended) A gram-positive bacterium transformed with the ~~at least one~~ expression cassette as claimed in Claim 12.

21. (Previously Presented) The bacterium of Claim 20, which is a lactic

acid bacterium.

22. (Previously Presented) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises culturing a gram-positive bacterium transformed with at least one expression cassette of Claim 12.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 22, wherein the gram-positive bacterium is a lactic acid bacteria.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 22, wherein the lactic acid bacteria is selected from the group consisting of lactococci, lactobacilli and streptococci.

25. (Previously Presented) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises the steps of:

- a) introducing in said bacterium at least one expression cassette of Claim 12, comprising a sequence encoding said protein;
- b) culturing said bacterium in a medium comprising an amount of Zn^{+2} that is sufficient to repress the expression of the protein;
- c) inducing the production of said protein by Zn^{+2} depletion of said medium; and
- d) recovering the protein produced.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 25, wherein the Zn^{+2}

depletion of the medium is effected by adding a divalent cation-chelating compound to the medium.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 25, wherein the Zn^{+2} depletion of the medium is effected by culturing the bacterium until depletion of the Zn^{+2} occurs in the medium.

28. (Previously Presented) A method of controlling expression of a promoter of the ZitRSQP operon in a bacterium, which comprises varying concentration of Zn^{+2} in a medium containing the bacterium.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 28, wherein the increasing the Zn^{+2} concentration represses expression of the promoter.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 28, wherein decreasing the Zn^{+2} concentration promotes expression of the promoter.

31. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of Claim 12, wherein ~~the~~ sequence ~~b)~~ encodes encoding the polypeptide exhibiting has at least 85% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

32. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of claim 31, wherein ~~the~~ sequence ~~b)~~ encodes a encoding the polypeptide exhibiting has at least 95% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

33. (Currently Amended) The expression recombinant vector of claim 19, wherein the sequence b) of said ~~expression cassette encodes a~~ encoding the polypeptide exhibiting has at least 85% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

34. (Currently Amended) The expression recombinant vector of claim 33, wherein the sequence b) of said ~~expression cassette encodes a~~ encoding the polypeptide exhibiting has at least 95% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

35. (New) The expression cassette of claim 12, wherein the sequence encoding the polypeptide of b) has at least 85% identity with GenBank AAK06214.